

WINTER 2002

NEWS BRIEF

Neighborhood Networks

U.S. Department of Housing
and Urban Development
Office of Multifamily Housing
www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

Neighborhood Networks: 2002 and Beyond

An Interview With Delores Pruden, Director, HUD's Multifamily Neighborhood Networks



Delores Pruden was named director of HUD's Multifamily Neighborhood Networks in January 2001. In this position, Pruden manages a staff that oversees the Neighborhood Networks program. She monitors field support and coordinates with other HUD offices that have programs similar to Neighborhood Networks. In the questions and answers (Q & A) below, Pruden highlights recent Neighborhood Networks milestones and shares her vision for the future.

Q. Can you give us a snapshot of Neighborhood Networks today?

A. This is an exciting time for Neighborhood Networks. With more than 840 centers in operation across America, the program continues to increase rapidly. In fact, we now have a center in the Virgin Islands with others in Puerto Rico.

It's rewarding to see the individual successes grow along with Neighborhood Networks. Residents in HUD housing communities have obtained jobs, gone to college, moved from welfare to work and bought homes. These are real-life success stories. Property owners and managers, too, report that Neighborhood Networks centers give them an edge—helping to reduce vacancy rates, stabilize the community, lower crime and vandalism and engage residents.

Q. What are some highlights or milestones that were achieved during the past year?

A. In January 2001, with its growing national presence and impact, HUD decided to create a Headquarters Neighborhood Networks staff with a

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Michigan Youth Learn to Map Their Success

Youth from the Walton Park Manor Neighborhood Networks Center in Pontiac, Michigan, earned a unique opportunity to be presenters last September at the Young Cooperators Program at the National Association of Housing Co-ops (NAHC) Conference in New Orleans. As part of a workshop session, the youth answered questions about how youth and adults can work together to improve their communities.

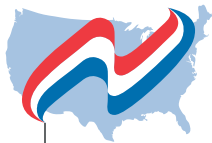
The youth serve on the Walton Park Manor Junior Board of Directors, which was awarded \$1,000 by NAHC. The junior board actively involves youth in community development. Beginning in the summer of 2001, six youth from Walton Park, ages 12 to 18, spoke with community leaders and designed an "ideal" community.

Directed by Michigan State University Extension School staff, the board and other youth participated

in a community asset mapping exercise to identify community assets and resources. Participants included other residents and community leaders from the United Way, Baker College, the Oakland County Department of Community and Urban Affairs, and the local U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development office.

"The exercise helped the youth identify how they can contribute to the community," says Joseph Bradley, president of the board at Walton Park Manor. Following the sessions, the youth used the center's computers to correspond by e-mail with the other participants.

The Yapo Computer Learning Center at Walton Park Manor, which opened July 2000, serves approximately 400 low- to moderate-income residents in 179 units. The majority of residents are single mothers, of those almost 50 percent are under the age of 18.



NASA Web Cast Inspires Learning at Centers Nationwide

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recently sponsored an interactive Web cast on “NASA Robotics for Exploration and Discovery” with 24 Neighborhood Networks centers and more than 300 participants.

The November 14 Web cast presented a unique opportunity to bring the excitement of NASA space science to Neighborhood Networks centers. Elementary and high school students participating in the event were able to:

- Hear from NASA experts about the science and engineering of robotics.
- Find out how NASA uses robots for planetary exploration, assisting astronauts and discovering new science.
- Learn about future innovations in robotics and how to become a roboticist.
- Chat with high school students who have participated in robot-building competitions sponsored by NASA.
- Submit questions and receive responses online from NASA roboticists and other students.

“Very good info for the kids and the members of our center. It was great to learn more about technology. It was a great pleasure,” said Mary-Ann Carrasquillo of the Holyoke Neighborhood Networks Center in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

Neighborhood Networks centers that participated in the Web cast and survey received certificates. Cen-



Kids at the Magic Johnson Center at Ujima Village in Los Angeles view a NASA Web cast.

ters that completed the post-Web cast survey also received a NASA CD, “A Snapshot of Education Technology for 2000–2001,” which contains links to NASA Web sites and projects and can be sorted by grade level and technology, and geography, math and science.

The Web cast was part of a collaborative partnership between NASA’s Learning Technologies Project and Neighborhood Networks.

For additional information or to learn more about this or future NASA/Neighborhood Networks Web events, call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll free at (888) 312–2743, or visit the Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.

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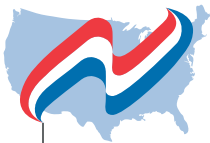
full-time director. This allows us to now provide greater support and guidance to field offices.

In June 2001, we celebrated the success of 13 students who graduated from the FBI Junior National Academy in Quantico, Virginia. We also held our first satellite training for HUD Neighborhood Networks coordinators in July 2001. In October 2001, we awarded a new technical assistance contract to Aspen Systems Corporation. In November 2001, centers participated in a NASA web cast on robotics. These are some noteworthy highlights among many.

Q. What lies ahead for Neighborhood Networks in 2002?

A. Year 2002 promises to be busy. We are planning national and regional activities that will help strengthen centers. Three Regional Technical Assistance Workshops (RTAWs) will offer technical assistance and provide valuable information to center directors and staff. HUD also plans to conduct training for all HUD Neighborhood Networks staff. The year will be highlighted by two national events—the Neighborhood Networks National Conference and Neighborhood Networks

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Detroit Residents Learn to Build Computers

Why not build your own computers and save money doing it? That's exactly what Neighborhood Networks center users did at the Elijah Project in Detroit.

With participants ranging in age from 19 to over 60 and a retired 30-year General Motors employee providing instruction, the Neighborhood Networks center conducted a one-day course in building computers. Participants learned the basics of installing and configuring the central processing unit, memory card, fan attachment, hard drive, CD-ROM drive, and floppy drive. Not only did the course save the center more than \$300 on each of the five computers initially built, but it also provided valuable technical experience to community members.

With strong support from the Reverend Nicholas Hood III, the Elijah Project's Neighborhood Networks center serves residents of the Medical Center Courts Apartments, the Plymouth United Church of Christ congregation, and the surrounding community. Medical Center Courts provides 230 units of HUD-assisted housing; the Plymouth United Church congregation has approximately 2,000 members. The center currently draws between 75 and 100 regular users, mostly from among youth ages 6 to 14 and seniors ages 55 and older.



Elijah Project community members build and configure PCs.

Debra Whiting, director of the Elijah Project, is pleased that community members with little exposure to computers are able to learn not only the basics of computer hardware and software but also use the center resources for e-mail and résumé building. The Neighborhood Networks center offers a free computer training class twice a week and plans to offer troubleshooting and repair courses to community members.

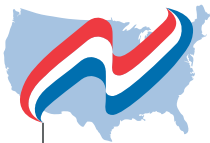
Neighborhood Networks, Continued from page 2

Week. More details on these exciting events are coming. Centers should watch their e-mail, fax and the Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.

- Q. What is your vision and goal for Neighborhood Networks?**
- A.** Looking ahead in 2002 and beyond. We want to ensure Neighborhood Networks centers' sustainability by building staff capacity. To achieve this, we plan to include in our technical assistance to centers how to identify and win grants for funding, manage and administer programs, increase center participation and market center benefits to residents and owners. This year, centers will receive a new Model Neighborhood Networks

Tool Kit, which will include guidance materials relating to organizational structure, program development and partnerships.

And yes, the vision. We will strive for more uniform centers so that a resident of HUD-assisted and/or -insured housing will know that if he or she wants to attend a multifamily Neighborhood Networks center, it will have certain characteristics, such as standard hours of operation and programs offered. Thanks to HUD's Neighborhood Networks coordinators, property owners and managers and center staff, we look forward to the continued growth and development of the Neighborhood Networks program.



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Multiple Neighborhood Networks Centers Benefit Owners, Managers and Residents

Opening multiple Neighborhood Networks centers is a great investment. That is the bottom line for housing owners and managing agents in Housing and Urban Development housing communities who report that Neighborhood Networks centers give them an edge.

These are some of many positive Neighborhood Networks outcomes:

- Reduced vacancy rates.
- Reduced maintenance costs.
- Increased rent payments.
- Increased sense of community.
- Improved property image.
- Resulted in fewer security risks.
- Provided greater ease in marketing properties.

Of course, the most rewarding results have been achieved by residents who have landed jobs, increased their income, gone to college, moved from welfare to work and bought homes after completing training at centers.

Achieving the goal of creating positive change for residents and communities is why many property owners and managers have chosen to establish multiple centers across the country. Interstate Realty Management, for example, operates 13 centers in Maryland, New Jersey, Oklahoma and Pennsylvania. The company plans to open at least 25 more centers nationwide.

“To a management company, a Neighborhood Networks center enhances our ability to market our



Opening a Neighborhood Networks center brings the community together, property owners and managing agents say.

properties and our corporate profile,” says Jacqueline Jones, director of social services at Interstate, which has a portfolio of 200 properties nationwide.

More than a decade ago, Interstate, an affiliate of Michaels Development Company of Marlton, New Jersey, answered the challenge of contemporary property management by developing a comprehensive social services program to address the needs of residents living in its complexes. In 1995, Interstate expanded its supportive services by opening its first Neighborhood Networks computer training center at Montgomery Townhouses in Philadelphia. Since then more centers have followed. In 1999, Montgomery Townhouses received a HUD Best Practices award for its Neighborhood Networks center.

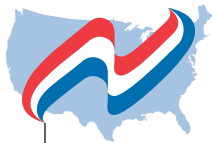
“We found we were creating a sense of community, which in turn helps us maintain our [housing] asset. When residents can do better, it has a positive effect overall on the management of properties,” Jones says.

Interstate’s properties that have Neighborhood Networks centers are a lower security risk and have increased numbers of employed residents, according to Jones. To date, more than 200 graduates of Interstate’s

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Interstate Realty uses the Neighborhood Networks Center at Montgomery Townhouses to market this Philadelphia property.

**Multiple Neighborhood Networks Centers, Continued from page 4**

Neighborhood Networks centers have been placed in jobs earning an average of \$8 to \$10 an hour.

To track activities at its Neighborhood Networks centers, Interstate gathers data each month from its sites. It is computerizing and centralizing its records, identifying information such as the number of residents who have obtained employment, education and literacy, and income levels and job retention rates.

Benefits Accrue to Residents

Revitalization of Village American Apartments in Houston was under way when its Neighborhood Networks center opened.

"I haven't done any statistical research, but my gut [feeling] is that [the center] has given people an opportunity to improve their skills. It's a calling card," says Ralph Johnson, regional director for Westmark Management Company, which manages property for Villa Americana Associates, Ltd. Although the property's new physical appearance may account for some increase in applicants, Johnson views the Neighborhood Networks center as an added benefit.

Johnson believes that the center at Village American has improved tenants' ability to become self-supporting. "I think people realized they would need

skills and they could live here and attend class. I know a lot more people are working now than four years ago."

For more information about Neighborhood Networks centers, call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll free at (888) 312-2743, or visit the Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org.



Neighborhood Networks centers offer a wide range of services. For example, seniors can interact via Internet with friends and family.

Visit our Web site at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

HUD Neighborhood Networks NEWS BRIEF

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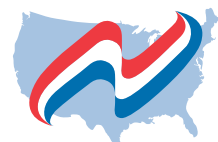
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